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SUBJECT: TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS IN IRAQ

REF: BAGHDAD 2403

Classified By: Political Counselor Yuri Kim for Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

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¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Senior GOI and judicial officials tell us that trafficking in women and young boys for the purposes of prostitution remains a widespread problem in Iraq, with victims either sold to traffickers by their families or kidnapped by criminal gangs. Iraqi trafficking victims often find themselves forced into prostitution abroad or in a few cases recruited by terrorists to serve as suicide bombers. These officials also tell us that there has also been an increase in the trafficking of human organs. The GOI has formed an interagency committee to combat trafficking, begun a public awareness campaign at youth centers and schools, and drafted legislation to increase the penalties for those engaged in trafficking. END SUMMARY.

Iraq: Both a Source and Destination Country

¶2. (C) On October 12, DCM for Transition Assistance and the Embassy's Women's Issues Coordinator (DCMAT) met with the Deputy Minister of Interior Hussein Ali Kamal and Judge Hadeel Najim Abdullah from the Baghdad Courthouse in al-Karkh to discuss trafficking in persons in Iraq. Judge Hadeel began the conversation by saying that many poor Iraqi families continue to sell their daughters to men with the promise of marriage or place them in forced marriages because of their inability to care for large numbers of children. These girls are then often taken to other regions in Iraq or to neighboring countries to become part of the underground sex trade. Hadeel said this form of trafficking was particularly widespread in the province of Hillah and in rural villages where dire economic conditions and conservative attitudes toward reporting such cases contribute to the problem. There had been a notable increase in young girls between the ages of 12-13 being abducted by criminal gangs and then trafficked to night clubs within Iraq or overseas for prostitution in Syria, Iran, and Saudi Arabia. The few who are rescued face social stigma and difficulties returning to their communities, Hadeel observed.

¶3. (C) Hadeel noted that female foreign workers who are sometimes trafficked into Iraq with promises of legitimate work in the Middle East, instead are brought to Baghdad to be placed in the sex and/or labor trade. In Iraq, there are employers that contract with traffickers for business and residential workers, and female foreign workers are often victims of sexual assault by their employers. These women are afraid to report sexual abuse because their employers retain their passports and threaten them with deportation and/or arrest for theft or prostitution. Hadeel said these abuses are often not pursued by the police and/or courts and in fact, a foreign woman may be detained until her country of origin assists her to obtain a new passport to return home. (Note: In July and August the GOI, with the assistance of the Embassy and MNF-I, repatriated 14 Ugandan women who had been trafficked into Iraq for the purposes of labor exploitation

and in at least one case had been sexually assaulted.
(Reftel).)

TIP and Terrorism

14. (C) Hadeel stated that, similarly, when Iraqi women escape their husbands or captors, they are often reported for prostitution and arrested by the authorities. In some cases, trafficked women become desperate and trade one form of criminal activity for another or are recruited by terrorists.

On a recent visit to the Karada Girls Detention Facility, Q On a recent visit to the Karada Girls Detention Facility, DCMAT met two cousins from Diyala who were forced to marry at the ages of 13 and 15. Both girls became part of a terrorist group that planned to use them as female suicide bombers. One of the girls, Rani Ibrahim, now 17, was convicted of attempted bombing and sentenced to 7 years in prison. The other girl, Nibras Ali A'abassm now 15, is awaiting trial on terrorist-related charges, and remains in the detention facility with her two young children.

Trafficking in Boys and Organs

15. (C) Deputy Minister Kamal concurred with Hadeel's assessment of the trafficking problem in Iraq and stated that he had recently traveled to Syria and encountered "hundreds of cases" of Iraqi women who had been arrested for prostitution and put into Syrian jails. Kamal said he had asked the Government of Syria (SARG) to return the women to

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Iraq so that the GOI could deal with their cases, but that the SARG had been uncooperative. Kamal suggested that Syrian criminal elements were using the girls to spy on the local Iraqi population. He said it was difficult for the GOI to combat trafficking due to the porous nature of its land borders, but that there had been a few cases in which Iraqi intelligence had prevented young girls traveling with older men on fake marriage documents from leaving the country. Asked about trafficking in young boys, Kamal responded that this too was a problem and that boys were often trafficked to the Gulf for sex. Kamal also reported that Iraqi boys have also become a source for organ transplants like kidneys and that Baghdad hospitals do not question the "voluntary" donation of such organs from the boys because often the father of the boy is present to consent to the procedure.

GOI Response

16. (C) On October 14, Poloff met with Ministry of Human Rights Director General Sa'ad Fatehalla, who chairs the GOI's interagency trafficking in persons committee, to discuss what actions the GOI had taken to combat trafficking.

Fatehalla stated that the GOI had formed the interagency committee in January 2009 -- consisting of representatives from the Ministries of Human Rights, Foreign Affairs, Interior, and Labor and Social Affairs -- primarily to develop anti-trafficking legislation. That legislation would establish a permanent inter-agency committee in Baghdad and place strong criminal penalties on those convicted of trafficking. Fatehalla said the legislation had been submitted to the Shura Council and was currently awaiting the approval of a special committee within the Council. He added that until the draft legislation is passed (something he predicted would not happen until a new government was formed next year) the ad hoc committee would continue to function as the coordinating body for trafficking issues.

17. (SBU) Fatehalla stated that the Ministry of Human Rights was currently engaged in a public awareness campaign on

trafficking and that it had held workshops at facilities managed by the Ministry of Youth and Sports targeting children. He said more workshops were planned in the coming months in various provinces throughout Iraq and that an agreement had been reached with Minister of Education to do similar activities with Iraqi schools and universities. Fatehallah also said the Ministry of Human Rights was trying to prepare a database on trafficking that would provide them with a better sense of where to target their efforts, but stated that it was difficult to get good information on the problem.

¶8. (C) COMMENT: While it has been known for some time that trafficking was a widespread problem in Iraq due endemic poverty, criminality, and violence, it was sobering to hear senior GOI officials acknowledge the extent of the problem and suggest ways to combat it. That the GOI has drafted anti-trafficking legislation and undertaken a public awareness effort are positive steps in combating the problem of trafficking. The Embassy's Rule of Law office is also making a concerted effort to encourage the Ministry of Interior and Higher Judicial Council to address Iraq's trafficking problem and work with them to provide training and education. We will also continue to press for the passage of the anti-trafficking legislation after national elections in January. END COMMENT.

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